PAPER FOR
WOMEN'S SUFFERAGE

Woman's Suffrage

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Woman's Suffrage

Women's suffrage was one of the most widespread movements in American history. Dedicated courageous men and women worked very hard for many years to achieve rights for women.

The right to vote was limited to adult males who owned land. The first incident of an American woman being denied the right to vote occurred in Maryland on January 21, 1648. The woman was Miss Margaret Brent, who was also the first female lawyer in the American colonies. Miss Brent was a wealthy landowner, and she felt all owners of land should be represented (Daniel 65).

The actual suffrage movement in America began in the 1800's. Women became more educated and began to stand up for their rights. Those who supported woman's suffrage in America were known as Suffragists.

One of the first public hearings for woman's suffrage was in 1848 in Seneca Falls, New York at Wesleyan Chapel. The leaders of the convention were Elizabeth Cady Stanton and Lucretia Mott. They had decided to have this hearing after they had both attended the World Anti-Slavery Convention eight years before in London, England. The purpose of the Seneca Falls meeting was to discuss the social, civil, and religious rights of women (Adams 27). The men and women of the convention composed the Declaration of Sentiments, which called for women to have equal rights in education, landownership, and voting. The woman's movements was officially inaugurated at the Seneca Falls convention of 1848 (Millet 46).

Stanton's feelings about her life are clearly displayed in the following statement that she made:

> "The general discontent I felt with woman's portion as wife, mother, housekeeper, physician and spiritual guide, the chaotic condition into which everything fell without her constant supervision, and the wearied, anxious look of the majority of women, impressed me with the strong feeling that some active measures should be taken to remedy the wrongs of society in general, and of women in particular. My experience at the World Anti-Slavery Convention, all I had read of the legal status of women, and the oppression I saw everywhere, together swept my soul, intensified now by many personal experiences. . . I could not see what to do or where to begin--my only thought was a public meeting for protest and discussion."

Lucretia Mott was born in Nantucket, Massachusetts into a Quaker family. After completing her education in a Quaker school, Mott became a minister of the same religion. Like many other Quakers, she was active in the abolitionist movement. Before Mott and Elizabeth Cady Stanton joined forces, Mott helped found the American Anti-slavery Society and the Philadelphia Female Anti-slavery Society. Mott also helped organize the Anti-slavery Convention of American Women in 1837..

Equal voting rights became the main goal for women. They believed that if they had the right to vote then they could use it to gain other rights. Many people felt that women should

not have the right to vote because they were less intelligent, and consequently, women would make poor decisions. Others felt women would abandon their household responsibilities by becoming involved in politics. Senator Williams of Oregon was one of the many who was against the equal voting rights for women. He demonstrates this feeling in the following statement:

> "Sir, it has been said that 'the hand that rocked the cradle ruled the world,' and there is the truth as well as the beauty in that expression. Women in this country by their elevated social position, can exercise more influence upon public affairs than they could coerce by the use of the ballot. When God married our parents in the garden according to that ordinance they were made 'bone of one bone and flesh of one flesh;' and the whole theory of government and society proceeds upon the assumption that their interests are one, that their relations are so intimate and tender that whatever is for the benefit of the one is the benefit of the other...The woman who undertakes by the use of some independent political power to contend and fight against man, displays a spirit which would, if able, convert all the now harmonious elements of society into a state of war, and make every home hell on earth" (Millett 41).

Women formed several organizations that supported an ammendment to the Constitution giving women the right to vote.

These organizations included the National Woman Suffrage Association, led by Susan Bromwell Anthony and Elizabeth Cady Stanton, the American Woman Suffrage Association, led by Lucy Stone, and the Woman's Christian Temperance Union, led by Frances Willard. The American Woman's Suffrage Association joined the National Woman Suffrage Association in 1890 (Stephenson 282).

Susan B. Anthony was born in Adams, Massachusetts. She was a descendant of a Quaker family that believed in equality of men and women. Anthony's family supported major reforms such as anti-slavery and temperance. Anthony served as the president of the National Woman Suffrage Association from 1892 until 1900. She died in 1896.

In 1869, Wyoming granted suffrage to women (Stephenson 282). After several states did the same as Wyoming, an ammendment was finally added to the Constitution in 1920 (Daniel 615). The nineteenth ammendment to the United States Constitution says, "The right of citizens of the United States to vote shall not be denied or abridged by the United States or by any state on account of sex."

"Equal rights, equal responsibilities, are all that women should ask. With high civic ideals, politics will uplift women, make their view of life larger, their sphere bigger and holier (Squire 283)."

After a century of hard work by the Suffragists, equal voting rights for women were gained. The dedication of the early Suffragetts set an example for all women to follow.

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